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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 001165

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: KARIM AGREES TO DISARM MILITIA,  
ENTER FARDC AS COLONEL

REF: A. KINSHASA 1104

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 1091

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Peter Karim, leader of the Ituri-based Front for National Integration (FNI), has agreed to disband his militia in exchange for the promise to be integrated in the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) and given the rank of colonel. In addition, all militia members from the FNI who voluntarily disarm will also be integrated into the FARDC. Following the successful resolution of the hostage negotiation with Karim (ref A), MONUC and the FARDC have also initiated contact with other Ituri militia leaders -- notably Matthieu Ngonjolo and Cobra Matata -- in an effort to have their militias disarmed and their members integrated into the Congolese military. End summary.

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KARIM AGREES TO DISARM, INTEGRATE MILITIA  
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[1](#)2. (C) After a weeks-long series of negotiations between Peter Karim and GDRC representatives, the militia leader released unharmed July 8 the five remaining MONUC Nepalese peacekeepers who had been held hostage since May 28 (ref A). During these negotiations, the GDRC representatives promised -- and Karim subsequently agreed -- to integrate Karim and his militia members into the FARDC in exchange for the safe release of the hostages. A new round of talks with Karim, GDRC officials and local community leaders began July 13 in Doi (approximately 40 miles northeast of Bunia) to work out the details of the integration plan.

[1](#)3. (C) According to MONUC officials, Karim agreed to disband the FNI militia in exchange for a position in the Congolese military. Initially, Karim reportedly proposed that he be given the rank of general in the FARDC and that he be given control of his own military region in northeastern DRC bordering Uganda and Sudan. Karim demanded as well that the FARDC should not abuse local populations or commit human rights abuses. Ultimately, Karim agreed to accept the rank of colonel in the FARDC, and that the question of establishing a separate military region could be dealt with after FNI forces had been trained and integrated into the FARDC. As a sign of his good faith and willingness to accept integration, Karim and 70 of his militia followers July 14 met with MONUC military observers in Kpandroma to return the weapons and uniforms seized from the seven MONUC Nepalese peacekeepers who had been held hostage.

[1](#)4. (C) Karim's militia will be received at three different demobilization points in Ituri: Kpandroma, Nizi and Bunia.

Karim and an initial group of 70 militia members had planned to arrive at the Kpandroma site (about 55 miles northeast of Bunia) July 17 to begin the integration and training process. The Kpandroma site, which is operated by CONADER (the Congolese agency in charge of demobilization), was unable to open July 17 because it lacked sufficient materials such as welcome kits, food, and accommodations for the ex-combatants. According to FARDC officials, Karim and his men are now expected to begin the integration process July 21. Karim has claimed that he has more than 6,000 FNI militia members ready and willing to disarm, although MONUC officials say they believe the figure is closer to 600 members.

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BYPASSING BRASSAGE FOR ITURI BRIGADES  
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15. (C) Upon entering the integration sites, the militia members will receive 10 days of training at a site south of Bunia before officially entering the ranks of the FARDC. Unlike other militia members or armed groups that have chosen military integration, FNI militia members will not be required to go through the process of brassage -- a condition agreed to by the FARDC and the GDRC during negotiations with Karim. MONUC Chief Military Information Officer Lt. Col. Mike Burke said that following this training, the ex-FNI members will be added directly to the existing FARDC integrated brigades currently in Ituri: the first, the fourth and the sixth. Burke said the hope is to spread out these militia members as much as possible through the FARDC's forces in Ituri, so there will be no concentration of power or essentially an "FNI brigade" of the FARDC. Burke added that inevitably some ex-FNI members will be based near their home

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villages or regions they previously controlled as part of the militia. Burke said, however, that MONUC has not been consulted by FARDC or GDRC officials regarding the brigades into which Karim and his FNI members will be integrated.

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MAKING NEW CONTACTS  
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16. (C) Hoping to build momentum in the fight against militias based on the experience with Karim, MONUC, FARDC and Congolese government officials have now begun establishing contacts with other Ituri militia leaders, with the aim of persuading them to disband their armed groups and integrate into the Congolese military. Burke said FARDC and GDRC representatives -- with facilitation from MONUC -- have been in contact with Matthieu Ngonjolo, another leader of the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC). Burke said officials have been in touch with Ngonjolo for "several weeks" following the hostage-taking by Karim at the end of May, and Ngonjolo has apparently been "receptive" to the idea of negotiations to facilitate disarmament. Formal discussions between Ngonjolo and an FARDC/GDRC delegation are expected to begin in Ituri July 20. Similarly, Burke said Colonel Emile Muhito, the head of military and political wing of the Patriotic Force of Resistance in Ituri (FRPI) who surrendered to MONUC peacekeepers in June (ref B), has been assisting MONUC and the FARDC in making contact with Cobra Matata, one of the FRPI's military commanders.

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COMMENT: REPEATING DANGEROUS MISTAKES  
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17. (C) Disbanding the FNI militia and integrating Karim into the FARDC eliminates a significant security threat throughout much of northern Ituri. At the same time, however, integrating Karim and his forces into the Ituri FARDC brigades is a much more menacing proposition and repeats past mistakes the GDRC has made with regard to coopting other armed groups. The GDRC followed a similar pattern in dealing

with other militia leaders, notably General Jerome Kakawave, allowing their troops to be integrated into the FARDC, despite having fought against them. Lacking the means to arrest or eliminate Karim himself, the GDRC apparently opted to negotiate with the FNI leader to secure the release of the MONUC hostages. Moreover, as MONUC's policy and mandate prohibited it from negotiating with Karim, MONUC was largely reduced to the role of observer during the hostage negotiations, and could not realistically object to any agreements reached with Karim. The deal reached with Karim only serves to further weaken the bargaining position of the GDRC in future attempts to coopt militias.

18. (C) Incorporating these militia members into the Ituri integrated brigades will ultimately undermine efforts to professionalize and discipline the FARDC. The purpose of brassage is to break up former armed groups and disperse their members throughout the country so they no longer pose a threat in the regions where they previously operated. In the case of General Jerome, the pretense of brassage was at least maintained as his militia was sent to neighboring North Kivu for integration and training. But keeping the unbrassaged ex-FNI forces in Ituri -- where the militias conducted illegal trade and harassed local populations -- will provide continued temptation for these same troops, regardless of the FARDC uniform they wear. Moreover, adding these suspect elements into the FARDC -- which itself has discipline problems and often engages in gold and timber smuggling -- will erode efforts to build an effective military force. At the very least, if the ex-FNI militia members seek military integration, they should enter the brassage process and be deployed to other areas of the country. While the immediate goal is to resolve the continuing insecurity in Ituri due to militia threats, it is being achieved now at the expense of a much larger objective: the professionalization of the FARDC, which in the long run will provide a greater sense of security for Ituri and the rest of the country.

19. (C) It is possible that the GDRC has struck this deal in bad faith -- in other words, with the intent of eventually arresting Karim and other key leaders after some period of time. It is also conceivable that the deal was struck purely for expediency, to get by the immediate crisis, with little thought yet to longer-term plans. This bargain, however, while providing breathing space in Itrui immediately before

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the critical July 30 elections, obviously does not resolve the bigger security problems in the District. End comment.  
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